

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

INSIDE
TRACKS

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Black Bear Project Underway in the Swan

A few years ago, Region One's Citizen Black Bear Committee put together a package of recommendations that improved the management of black bears in northwest Montana. One of the issues the committee, along with FWP biologists, struggled with was how to interpret annual black bear harvest data. These issues were elevated to a statewide level where the decision was made to focus FWP resources on learning more about black bears, specifically how to interpret the age structure of harvested bears.

Beginning last year, FWP embarked on a 10-year effort to collect detailed information on black bears relative to harvest throughout the state. The primary goal is to determine if bears are being harvested at a sustainable level, or if they could sustain more harvest in representative areas of the state. The project in northwest Montana focuses on lands in the Swan Drainage.

Project Biologist Rick Mace is us-



BIOLOGISTS Rick Mace and Tim Thier tag a large, sedated black bear captured during the project.



A CINNAMON-COLORED BLACK BEAR is drawn to a barbed wire site where it will leave a hair sample to be collected later by biologists.

ing radio telemetry and state-of-the-art DNA fingerprinting techniques to determine the number and movements of bears in the area. Bears are being tagged and radio collared in the Swan Valley to document their movements and causes of mortality. The radioed females will provide information on reproductive rates.

According to Mace, 77 individual black bears have been captured and tagged. About 30 of those bears are wearing radio collars. By following these radioed bears, biologists can determine habitat use, home ranges, and survival rates.

In addition to the capture and radio telemetry work, DNA fingerprinting from hair samples is also being used to "mark" bears. Bears are lured into a small barbed wire corral where they leave a sample of hair. These hairs are then analyzed in the lab to determine the sex of the bear and its individual DNA identification. By comparing the DNA collected from legally harvested bears to this large sample collected in the field, biologists will determine harvest rates. In 2001 in the Swan valley, 177 DNA barbed wire sites were set out. At the end of two weeks biologists collected nearly 600 samples of hair; from each of these samples sex and individual identification will be determined.

Over the next few years, FWP will be conducting this DNA work in four to

five places in Montana, on both sides of the Continental Divide. In this fashion, biologists will be able to estimate harvest rate of black bears in a number of places.

Mace hopes the project will help FWP determine if the data obtained from the mandatory check of harvested bears gives FWP managers an accurate picture of the status of the wild population. The project is important because it will help the agency improve the management of black bears and black bear hunting.

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Hunters: Stop at Check Stations - It's the Law


Montana law requires that hunters stop at all game check stations. There are a number of good reasons for this law, beyond the importance of reducing game violations, including:

- Biological data is collected on age, condition, and number of animals harvested. This information gives annual trends that reflect the status of the deer and elk herds;
- Hunters can pass along their observations on wildlife and habitat to biologists and wardens;
- Information collected helps wildlife managers set hunting season types and quotas.

When hunters stop at check stations, they contribute to this body of information that is important in managing deer and elk. It is vital that hunters stop at the stations whether or not they have harvested game (either big game or mountain grouse).

Biological information summarized from the 7 permanent northwest Montana check stations:

One valuable statistic that can be gleaned from check stations is the age structure of the annual deer and elk harvest. The first table below tracks the age classes of harvested whitetail bucks checked through 7 northwest Montana check stations since the winter of 1996/97.

The strong yearling age class in the 1998 and 1999 harvest sample that showed up as 2-year-olds in the 2000 harvest should produce older deer that will be available to hunters in the coming years. You can see a similar but less pronounced pattern in the mule deer information in the second table. 

Whitetail Deer

<u>Age in years</u>	<u>Number of deer in each age</u>					
	<u>1995</u>	<u>1996</u>	<u>1997</u>	<u>1998</u>	<u>1999</u>	<u>2000</u>
1.5	252	340	172	<u>292</u>	<u>575</u>	387
2.5	148	177	140	236	152	<u>370</u>
3.5	89	107	133	141	78	52
4.5	55	56	45	104	60	34
5.5	36	45	18	40	47	27
6.5	18	40	19	27	24	27
7.5	15	16	17	22	11	17
8.5	9	24	5	15	6	6
9.5	8	8	2	5	8	7
10.5	3	2	1	1	1	2
11.5	0	0	0	1	1	5
12.5	1	0	0	0	2	1
13.5	0	0	0	0	1	1
14.5	0	0	0	0	0	1




INFORMATION GATHERING. Biologists collect important information on overall age and health at FWP check stations.

Boone and Crockett Club Provides Record Service

Regional Wildlife Manager Jim Williams has been an official measurer for the Boone and Crockett Club since 1994. The Boone and Crockett Club, based in Missoula, is one of the oldest conservation organizations in the United States and keeps accurate records of harvested North American big game animals. This service is done free of charge.

Hunters that are interested in having their antlers/skulls measured must first have their trophies clean and dried for at least 60 days prior to being dropped off at the FWP regional headquarters to be scored. There also is a form to fill out that requires prerequisite information.

Tracking the antler and horn characteristics of game animals is one tool that wildlife managers can use to document the growth potential for different species. That information reflects habitat conditions and quality of the area in which the animal was harvested. 

Mule Deer

<u>Age in years</u>	<u>Number of deer in each age</u>					
	<u>1995</u>	<u>1996</u>	<u>1997</u>	<u>1998</u>	<u>1999</u>	<u>2000</u>
1.5	60	37	46	70	91	102
2.5	28	39	43	69	41	57
3.5	31	16	58	29	23	28
4.5	16	15	16	35	13	7
5.5	12	6	13	13	16	10
6.5	8	7	7	9	10	8
7.5	3	6	6	3	7	5
8.5	3	5	2	3	1	5
9.5	1	0	1	2	2	1
10.5	0	0	0	0	3	0
11.5	0	0	0	0	1	0

Advanced Hunter Education Course Held in Lincoln County

Volunteer Hunter Education Instructors and other volunteers hosted an advanced Hunter Education Course for youngsters near Libby. The program, begun by former FWP Commissioner Charlie Decker, has been held for a number of years. The Libby Rod and Gun Club has been a major sponsor.

According to organizer Tom Hoerlick, a total of 27 volunteers contributed 340 hours to plan, prepare, and conduct the camp. The course was attended by 24 youngsters who had already completed the basic Hunter Education Course.

Students took part in stations

which included shotgun, rifle, wildlife identification and biology, outdoor skills, hunter ethics, black powder, and archery. A .22 rifle was won by student Mathew Edlund of Libby in the annual raffle. Students were treated to lunch and dinner at the camp, and they played a hunting knowledge jeopardy game in the evening.

Businesses that contributed to the event included: Montana Machine; Timberline Auto; Libby Sports; First National Bank; Rosauers; McDonalds; and Empire Foods. FWP also helped with the program. 🦋



FIRST BOW SUCCESS. Andy Wilson of Kalispell took this fine Whitetail buck in the Flathead River Bottoms. This was Andy's first deer taken with a bow.

'Hooked on Fishing' Connects Kids to Nature

FWP's Hooked on Fishing Program is underway again in about 75 classrooms, mostly fourth grade, across northwest Montana.

Instructors John Cloninger, Roy Hassinger, Jan Thon, Leonard Howke, Chris Crane, Richard Janssen, and assistant instructor Kevin Fraley, work with the 75 teachers to introduce kids to fish identification, biology, habitat, fishing techniques, fly tying and other topics.

Students in each class also take part in three fishing trips during the year. One purpose of the program is to give students a positive lifetime activity that they can share with their families.

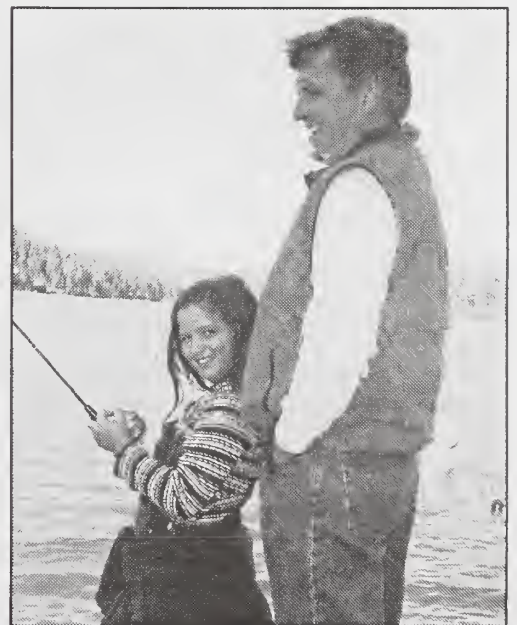


YOUNG HOOKED ON FISHING STUDENT Lily Clarke (left) is happy with this nice cutthroat trout caught at a high mountain lake near Condon.

Students in the Salmon Prairie one-room school spent the day recently hiking and fishing in the Mission Mountain Wilderness as part of the program.

FALL FISHING. In early October, fourth grade Edgerton School students (below left) caught rainbow trout at Foy's Lake near Kalispell.

A number of parents also came along to share the experience with their children.



Sommerfield Receives Supervisor's Award

Volunteer Dale Sommerfield received this year's FWP Supervisor's Award on October 15. Sommerfield has contributed greatly to fish, wildlife, and habitat management in northwest Montana through a number of efforts:

- Founded the Natural Resource Users Group, an organization dedicated to promoting the responsible use of renewable natural resources such as game and fish;
- Established the Montana Land Stewardship Program which has trained about 30 individuals to be land stewards for public and private timberlands;
- Served the past three years as Lead Hunter Education Instructor for the Kalispell area, coordinating the training of about 500 young hunters each year;
- Served the past four years on the Citizen Advisory Committee, a group that advises FWP on fish, wildlife, and parks issues.

Sommerfield, a mason by trade and avid hunter, trapper, and angler, has taken on these volunteer responsibilities as a second job. He has been effective in relaying

a common sense voice in wildlife management issues, and helping FWP to be more responsive to the public. Sommerfield lives in Kalispell with his wife, Karole, and his 17-year-old son, Scott. His daughter, Stacey, attends Montana State University in Bozeman.



LEADERS. Dale Sommerfield (right) is pictured at the recent Kalispell Hunter Education field course with the new lead instructor, Monty Long. Sommerfield served as lead instructor for three years and now passes the responsibility to Long.

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